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CCI TO PROBE 'EXPLOITATIVE' PRIVACY POLICY OF WHATSAPP

The Competition Commission of India on Wednesday directed its investigation arm to conduct a probe into WhatsApp's privacy policy

INVESTIGATION TO BE CONCLUDED IN 2 MONTHS

The move came after the fair trade regulator prima facie found the firm has contravened competition law provisions through its "exploitative and exclusionary conduct" in the garb of policy update. The CCI directed its investigation arm, the director general (DG), to complete the probe into WhatsApp's updated privacy policy and submit a report within 60 days |P12

DISCLOSE TO WHAT EXTENT IS DATA SHARED

- The Commission said users, as owners of their personalised data, are entitled to know the extent, scope and purpose of sharing of such information by WhatsApp with other Facebook companies
- WhatsApp claims the update does not expand its ability to share data with Facebook but offers transparency about data usage

CCI OBSERVATION AT PRELIMINARY STAGE AND WON'T IMPACT THE MERITS OF THE CASE

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Ball set rolling for Ramana to take over as next CJI

In-house panel of Supreme Court dismisses AP CM Jagan's charges

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
@ New Delhi

WITH just a month left for his retirement, Chief Justice of India S A Bobde has recommended the name of Justice N V Ramana as his successor.

Parallelly, an in-house inquiry against Justice Ramana following a complaint by Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Jagan Mohan Reddy on allegedly manipulating the Andhra Pradesh High Court's roster to lean towards the Telugu Desam Party and its supremo N Chandrababu Naidu, was dismissed, paving the way for his appointment as the new CJI.

A bland statement issued by the Supreme Court said: "A complaint dated 6th October, 2020 sent by the Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh to the Supreme Court was dealt with under the In-House Procedure and the same, on due consideration, stands dismissed. It must be noted that all the matters dealt with under the In-House Procedure being strictly confidential in nature, are not liable to be made public."

Justice N V Ramana

Among other allegations in Jagan's letter to CJI Bobde was the influencing of the Andhra High Court to stay a probe into an FIR filed by the Anti-Corruption Bureau against former Advocate General Dammalapati Srinivas and 12 others, including his (Justice Ramana's) two daughters, in the Amaravati land scam.

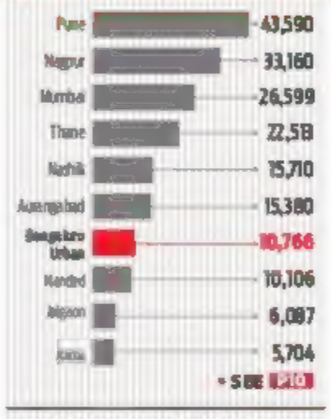
With CJI Bobde sending the recommendation letter, Justice Ramana is now in line to be appointed as the 48th CJI. He is expected to take over as topmost judge of the land on April 24 and will retire on August 26, 2022. Only twice so far, the set procedure was not followed — first when Justice A N Ray was appointed the CJI on April 25, 1973 superseding three senior-most judges and next when Justice M H Beg was appointed the CJI on January 29, 1977 superseding Justice H R Khanna.

Justice Ramana was appointed permanent judge of the Andhra High Court on June 27, 2000 and functioned as Acting Chief Justice of Andhra High Court from March 10, 2013 to May 20, 2013. Appointed as the Chief Justice of Delhi High Court on September 2, 2013, Justice Ramana was elevated as a judge of the SC on February 17, 2014.

The call of convention

As per convention, the CJI recommends the senior-most judge of the Supreme Court as his successor. The law minister puts it before the Prime Minister who advises the President on such appointments

TOP 10 DISTRICTS IN INDIA WITH HIGHEST ACTIVE CASES



• SEE P21

KARNATAKA SECOND WAVE BATTLE

Single-day positivity rate climbs to 2.12% on Wednesday, from 0.58% on March 1

12 people succumb to Covid in the state, of which 7 deaths reported in Bengaluru Urban

1,398 Bengaluru Urban reports the most cases, followed by Kalaburagi with 118 cases and Tumakuru with 94 cases

1,08,013 samples tested in the state during the day • SEE P21

3,68,457 INDIA'S TOTAL ACTIVE CASELOAD | **47,262** FRESH CASES RECORDED IN THE LAST 24 HOURS | **23,907** RECOVERIES IN A DAY

CENTRE CONFIRMS DOUBLE MUTATION IN MAHARASHTRA

SUMI SUKANYA DUTTA @ New Delhi

THE Centre on Wednesday officially announced the detection of a new double mutant Covid-19 virus, in addition to several variants of concern (VOC) that have been found in at least 18 states in India.

This newspaper, in its March 17 edition, was the first to report the two mutations — E484Q and L452R — found together in about 20% samples in Maharashtra. This double mutation has not been seen anywhere else globally yet.

The Union Health Ministry said since Indian SARS-CoV-2 Consortium on Genomics (INSACOG) began its work, 771 VOCs have been detected out of 10,787 positive samples shared by states. They include 736 samples that tested positive for the UK variant, 34 for of the South African variant and one of the Brazilian variant. These samples came from 18 states across the country.

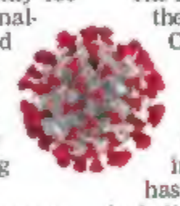
"Such (double) mutations confer immune escape and increased infectivity. These mutations have been found in about 15-20% of samples and do not match any previously catalogued VOCs," the ministry said. Also, of the 2,032 samples from all 14 districts in Kerala sequenced so far, the N440K variant that is associated with immune escape has been found in 123 from 11 districts. This variant was earlier found in 33% of samples from Andhra Pradesh, and in 53 of 104 samples from Telangana. P10

We have to understand that this virus will mutate and when strains are formed, then they can get dangerous and one needs to understand how the virus is behaving — Dr Satyanarayana Mysore, Head, Department of Sleep Medicine, Manipal Hospital

Small genome sample size, low funds hit studies

CHETANA BELAGERE @ Bengaluru

WHILE the Union Health Ministry has announced a new 'double mutant' variant in India, the National Institute of Mental Health and Neuro Sciences (NIMHANS) in Bengaluru — where genome sequencing of samples from across the state is being conducted — has also been able to test only 180 samples so far and the analysis have not revealed any new strain in Karnataka. The institute is also facing a severe fund crunch to carry out detailed sequencing procedures.



Medical experts, who are noticing changes in the behaviour of the virus in patients, argue that the samples collected in the state are extremely few and say that the situation calls for more genome sequencing to know if there is any new variant in the state which is leading to an increase in the number of cases.

Speaking to *TNIE*, Dr V Ravi, Nodal officer for genomic confirmation of SARS-CoV-2 and retired professor at NIMHANS, said, "Of all the samples we have tested in Karnataka, including the recent clusters from Yelahanka and the Nursing College in Bengaluru, there has been no new mutant variants. However, we are continuing to take samples for genomic sequencing."

The NIMHANS is also one of the labs under Indian SARS-CoV-2 Genomic Consortium (INSACOG). According to the data given by Dr Ravi, the lab began tests for genome sequencing from December 20 and has so far tested 180 samples, including UK returnees. Of the 75 traveller samples tested, they have found the UK strain in 30 samples and the South African strain in three samples in Karnataka. However, experts believe that the sample size of 180, given the positive numbers the state is witnessing now, is too small and they believe that the presence of a new variant cannot be ruled out. P3

National para athletics meet held in the dark

ASHIM SUNAM @ Bengaluru

IF a last-minute change of venue sounded extreme enough, para-atheletes at the ongoing National Para Athletics Championships were in for a rude shock on Wednesday night. For, shot put was conducted with help from mobile phone lights and car headlights at the Sree Kanteerava Stadium. The Paralympic Committee of India (PCI) didn't respond to calls but the videos doing the rounds painted a sorry picture of sport in India.

This incident under the Bengaluru lights was the latest in a series of snafus the PCI has seemingly entangled itself in since March 21. First, they shifted the competition from Chennai to Bengaluru leaving some athletes stranded. Even if they couldn't be blamed for that, as TN government denied permission due to rising Covid cases, the first day itself has eyebrow-raising episodes play itself out. First, deciding to organising a para meet at a venue not friendly to wheelchairs. Then, there were multiple reports of Covid-19 breaches, including not adhering to SOPs, a fact acknowledged by Sports Authority of India. P13

Budget business done, leaders focus on polls

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
@ Bengaluru

WITH bypolls in the state round the corner and the electioneering heat rising several notches in the neighbouring states ahead of the first phase of polling, the Karnataka legislature wound up business for the Budget Session on Wednesday. The early adjournment of the legislature will help the ruling and opposition parties kickstart their campaigning for upcoming bypolls for Maski and Basavakalyan Assembly seats and Belagavi parliamentary seat in a full-fledged manner.

Before being adjourned sine die, both the Assembly and Council passed finance-related bills and other key bill even as many legislators from treasury benches were missing. Senior members like C T Ravi, Dr C N Ashwath Narayan, Suresh Kumar, Sunil Kumar from BJP, who have been appointed as in-charge and campaigners for Assembly elections in other states, as well leaders like MLC Ravikumar, who have been appointed for bypolls in Karnataka, have been juggling between legislative and party duties.

No discussion or debate was held over supplementary estimates as a defiant government was keen on getting the Bills passed even as Congress refused to cooperate and participate in debate. For the third day in a row, no bills were discussed, scrutinised or debated in the House. The adjournment came on a day the Congress intended to stage an all-night protest inside Vidhana Soudha. The Opposition party now intends to take its protest outside the secretariat. P4

EXPRESS READ

Petrol price cut by 18 paise, diesel by 17 paise

NEW DELHI: In the first reduction in rates in over a year, petrol price on Wednesday was cut by 18 paise per litre and diesel by 17 paise a litre as international oil prices tumbled to the lowest since early February. Rates have been reduced across the country depending on the local incidence of taxation (VAT).

Dr Murthy is Surgeon General: US Senate

WASHINGTON: Indian-American physician Dr Vivek Murthy has been confirmed by the Senate as President Joe Biden's Surgeon General, a post he will occupy for the second time. In 2011, President Obama tapped him to serve on the advisory group on prevention, health promotion, and integrative and public health. P11

POLITICAL PULSE

Thumbs up for delivering devpt in Assam, but a big no for price rise

Ear to the Ground — ASSAM POLLS

H KHOGEN SINGH
@ Dibrugarh/Nagaon (Assam)

IF upgrading of national highways and construction of roads in the rural belts of Assam could win an election, then the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party should race to power, leaving in its wake a Congress-led alliance and a large number of smaller, ethno-nationalist political parties.

From Tinsukia in the eastern tip of the state to Nagaon in middle Assam and beyond, dump trucks, excavators, bulldozers and road rollers work through the day, forcing traffic to weave left and right at regular intervals. While rural roads are being metalled, the national highways are being four-laned.

"The BJP has done a lot of development work, it has made roads, toilets and houses," said Sanjib Bora, the owner of a shack restaurant next to the national highway in Chabua, Tinsukia. "People here will support the BJP for this."

Bora's sentiment was endorsed by Dhanesh Pegu, also a roadside dhaba owner in Dhemaji district next to the recently-opened Bogibeel bridge, the longest one on the Brahmaputra river.

"Modi ne bahut kaam kiya hain (Narendra Modi has done a lot of work)," he said.

"Take the Bogibeel bridge for instance, the foundation stone was laid by (H D) Deve Gowda, then (Atal Bihari) Vajpayee did some work but after that, there was a Congress government both at the Centre and in the state but nothing happened. When Modi came he finished the bridge," Pegu said.

It's no wonder then that from Modi, Union Home Minister Amit Shah, Chief Minister Sarabanda Sonowal and state Finance Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma to the ordinary BJP karyakarta (worker), development is one of the main talking points.

CONTINUED ON: P9

Thackeray starts damage control over allegations

SUDHIR SURYAWANSHI
@ Mumbai

MAHARASHTRA Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray called an urgent meeting of senior Cabinet ministers at his residence on Wednesday to discuss the political situation following the explosive letter written by ex-Mumbai top cop Param Bir Singh.

The meeting was in the backdrop of the Supreme Court's observation that Singh's allegations against Maharashtra Home Minister Anil Deshmukh were "quite serious". Singh had approached the SC challenging his transfer but the apex court directed him to approach the Bombay High Court. P10

Cyber scamsters carefully set their trap, Don't download or install app from unknown source
Installing any app from an unknown source can give fraudsters remote access to your mobile phone
If you have downloaded such apps delete them now. Also, keep a check on your app, SMS, email alerts and bank account statements
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